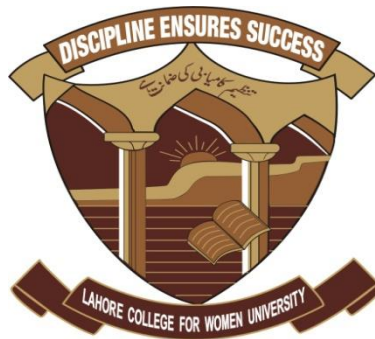


**An Optimistic Evolution of Existence in *Saffron Dreams*
by Shaila Abdullah**



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Declaration Form

I, Rabia Ashraf, declare that the Research Paper entitled **An Optimistic Evolution of Existence in *Saffron Dreams* by Shaila Abdullah** is my own work and is not submitted previously, in whole or partial, in respect of my any other academic award.

Signature of Candidate

I approve the above titled thesis to be submitted for Examination.

Signature of Supervisor

Chairperson Department of English

**An Optimistic Evolution of Existence in
Saffron Dreams by Shaila Abdullah**

This Research Paper is submitted by Rabia Ashraf to the Department of English,
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Rabia Ashraf

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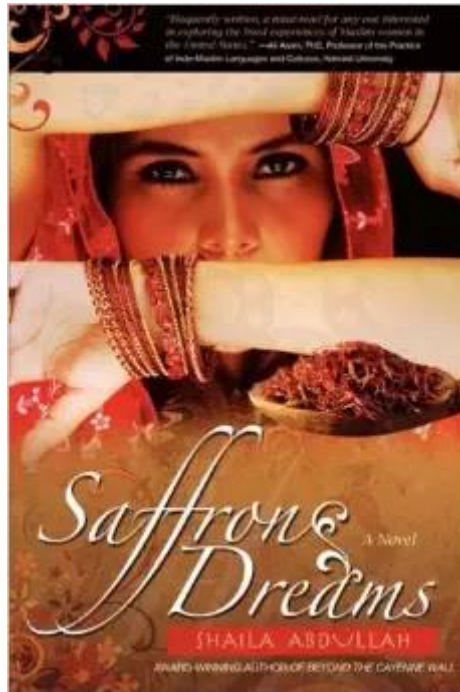
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Abstract

In the realm of emerging contemporary Pakistani writers, writing in English, Shaila Abdullah's name shines as an epitome of exuberant writing style and purely Pakistani thematic considerations. Bestowed with the title of 'Word Artist' by critics, Abdullah uses her sharp and precise images to tear open the façade of the conventional practices a society nurtures. By probing into the psychology of her protagonists, Abdullah delineates different levels of struggles these women have to go through in order to establish an identity and disclose the true meaning of their existence. Arissa Illah's journey in *Saffron Dreams* is unique in its own way. She gathers up all she is left with, after facing a great tragedy. She then, joins these bits and pieces of her life not leaving even for a moment, the hold of a subtle tinge of hope and positivity. This optimism makes her stand on her feet once again and understand the real meaning and purpose of her life. Her existence evolves through stages to acceptance and negation, making her a survivor who did not succumb to the circumstances of life.

Chapter 1 Introduction



Saffron Dreams (2009) deals with a common tragic experience of facing the aftermath of the death a loved one in an uncommon way. The subject of death is considered from many different standpoints in literature from around the world as man faces death, deals with the death of a loved one or ponders upon the religious or philosophical significance of death. Shaila Abdullah explores an urge of figuring out a form of life from the chaotic framework of external circumstances and deciphers how through ways of psychological progressive development, struggle blesses the protagonist, Arissa with life. Abdullah believes that by an optimistic interpretation of the hardships of life and rejuvenation as a key to the acceptance of darker reality, Tragedy, be it the loss of a loved one who is the sum and substance of your life, no

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longer remains tragic.



Courtesy: <http://shailaabdullah.com/author-visits/>

As a voice from another Continent, Abdullah is in no way unaware of the prevalent issues for discussion that contemporary Pakistani society offers. She moves from the plight of Pakistani women, their heart touching experiences and crude attempts to hold up in society to a larger perspective where one Pakistani woman experiences widowhood, loneliness, single parenthood, lack of maternal love and other similar external and internal conflicts. Abdullah focuses upon the psyche of an Asian woman who is very traditional and bound by some set norms passed on from generation to generation. But, her exploration is not the one seeking pity and sympathy from the reader instead it shows the hidden mental and psychological strength of a Pakistani woman who can conquer all with her resolute and firm outlook towards life. By this thematic specificity, Abdullah states the notion that self actualization or self hood is not an end in itself but it is the

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initiator of hope to move forward in life.

It is significant to note how the protagonist, Arrisa Illahi moves from pessimistic view of life towards acceptance, optimism and finally concludes with a definition of the nature, elements and ingredients of which human life is composed of. Arrisa undergoes progressive and gradual stages of psychological metamorphosis. Her mental travelogue is from despondency to expectancy and it is worth exploring even at minute stages of her conscience pricking her subtly while making strong decisions about her loved ones and her future course of life.

Existentialism attained the height of its popularity in France during World War II. After the Second World War, Jean Paul Sartre (1905-1980) came up with Existential philosophy. The main conceptions of Existentialism were expressed by Sartre in his lecture, 'Existentialism is Humanism' (1946). Sartre and other Existentialists gave importance to individual and his freedom. In *Saffron Dreams* (2009), Arrisa is ultimately alone, like an isolated island of subjectivity in an objective world, but she has absolute freedom over her internal nature, and the source of her value is only internal. Existentialism propounds the slogan of Existence preceding Essence by which they mean that human being has no predetermined nature or essence that controls him.

Research Methodology

The research methodology used in this work entitled *An Optimistic Evolution of Existence in Saffron Dreams by Shaila Abdullah* is analytical that discusses my work through a qualitative approach. Analytical and speculative research has been applied to highlight varied aspects of the primary source. This research paper explores the dimensions of protagonist's psychological development from hopelessness to hope and also figures out various Existential

themes prevalent in the novel. Also, Abdullah's novel *Saffron Dreams* (2009) has been analyzed, examined and probed with reference to the theories and ideas of Existentialists especially those of Jean Paul Sartre.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

There are number of reviews that address and appreciate *Saffron Dreams* (2009), Abdullah's writing style and expose prominent existential characteristics in the work. Some of these are as follows:

Olivia Baumgartner- Jackson who is a translator, interpreter and editor in United States writes about Abdullah's exuberant artistic and thematic skills in *Reader Views*, Modern History Press,

There are books that are beautiful simply because they are so positive and pleasant. And there are those that manage to be beautiful in spite of the pain, suffering and the heartbreak contained within. Shaila Abdullah's *Saffron Dreams* is both. Her writing is mesmerizing. On one hand it feels like a classically cut diamond - precise, sparkling, blindingly beautiful, but also incredibly sharp.
(2009)

Jackson talks about the sensuous experiences felt by the reader on reading *Saffron Dreams* (2009). Abdullah portrays Arissa within a medium of harshness amalgamated with softness of life. Her juxtaposition of hope and despair in the novel adds beauty and greatness to

the work. Jackson relates the work to a ‘diamond’ and finds it sharp but diverse containing many flavors and heart rending feelings.

Saima Shakil Hussain writes about Abdullah’s protagonists in Dawn Newspaper which is Pakistan’s leading and first English Newspaper. The title of her review is *Above and Beyond*,

The female protagonists may be rich and educated or illiterate and impoverished but one thing they all share is the courage to overcome their hard ship. Like so many real Pakistani women they are not just victims but also fighters and perhaps more importantly, survivors. (2009)

Abdullah’s protagonists including Arissa do not become victims of the social conventions and maltreatments. They are able to maintain their relations and connections in life. What Abdullah portrays is such a fight which does not end with no result but with a promise of a better future and a confirmation of the conception that survival is possible, no matter how hard the norms are. Through Existentialist underpinnings, it also becomes evident that struggle and the ability to survive in all kinds of undesirable circumstances stems out of one’s value of his life through which he explores the meaning of Existence.

Chapter 3 From Pessimism to Optimism

“If winter comes, can spring be far behind?”

(Shelley, Ode to West Wind.70)

The journey from Pessimism to Optimism can be termed as the one from the “tendency to see only what is gloomy and futile in life' to the 'tendency to look on the more favorable side of happenings” (The Random House Webster’s Dictionary). It is an evolution of positivity and hope from gloom and negativity making Optimism and Pessimism two different states of human mind set. Shaila Abdullah focuses upon the successful struggles of life as a triumphant journey from darkness to brightness. Giving a new definition of Tragedy, Abdullah considers tragedy an essential ingredient for the realization of one's potential to stand hardships. Pessimism is not compulsively a symbol of degeneration and decline of individuality. She propounds the conception of the 'Pessimism of Strength' (Higgins, Solomon 113). Her protagonist, Arissa Illahi throbs in a medium that challenges her at great levels projecting a belief that there is no greatness in living a life that meets no chaos. The value of individuality lies in facing the tough situations and utilizing all mental and physical powers to become a survivor. Abdullah thus deciphers how Arissa very gradually moves from a pessimistic outlook of life to happiness and the way her philosophy of life undergoes a radical transformation.

Optimism is a general idea that the future outcomes will be positive where as pessimism is a common notion that future events will have more probability of being negative. Determining

whether a person is an optimist or a pessimist depends upon the experiences he faces. Hope is a defining and essential characteristic of optimism. It involves two main components: an ability to plan paths to desirable goals and an agency or motivation to utilize the pathways. *Saffron Dreams* (2009) balances bitterness with happiness and focuses upon the growth of protagonist's view point from pessimism to optimism. Arissa uses both these components of hope to emerge out as a better wife, mother, daughter and a citizen.

Pessimism is a wrestling or fight within one's own psyche. Arissa, initially a pessimistic protagonist, continues to measure her life on a highly pessimistic scale framed within her own mind. Getting married to Faizan was a dream come true, 'evoking the dainty sweet fragrance of jasmine and the pungent scent of hina' and later, losing Faizan is defined by the "hodgepodge of colors" bleeding into one blunt shade of "scorching black" (Abdullah Chp 2). Opening her eyes in an affluent Pakistani family, Arissa finds herself in search of pure and genuine maternal love which her mother fails to give her because of other base concerns governing her life. Arissa struggles against insincere relations and experiences that it is the expectation that makes the heart weep for it is not blood that determines the presence or absence of love. A series of ominous happenings continue to disturb her before getting in a typical arranged marriage with Faizan. These premonitions have symbolic significance. The image of a '**Firedancer**' expressed by the beggar woman for Faizan reveals the couple's misfortune, hardship, helplessness, challenge and loss in future course of marital life. Thus, Abdullah prepares for the huge disaster very swiftly by laying bare, casements of gloomy predictions and happenings.

The very day Faizan becomes a pitiful victim of World Trade Centre Attacks, fire engulfing the fire dancer from all sides, Arissa undergoes a psychological shift. Expecting a child in near future as a single parent, she concludes that humans live a '**Sheltered Existence**'

(Abdullah Chp 8). She realizes how fragile and vulnerable human life is and the omnipresent threat that life faces of collapsing down at any moment. There is no running away from the sinister visage of death for '**Abramovitz's Satan**' (Chp 8) delivers its blow and brings the message of barrenness and loneliness since eternity. Her days lack brightness while her nights are loathsomely dark. Her emotional pain, depression and dominantly passive views about life show 'Depressive Realism' (Ingram 211).

As a young, expatriate, expecting widow, Arissa's first contact with conventional American society, after Faizan's death is a heinous experience. Race conflict becomes explicit in the incident where she moves out of her apartment after bereavement period and is bullied and harassed by a clan of young American boys. Her veil is labeled as a façade and they blame her for being the perpetrator of Attack on Twin Towers. The conflict of race overlooks the basic similarities as members of same specie (Blumer 38). The consequential attitude of Americans hit by the Attack is hostility towards the '**yellow race**'. There is a high degree of hatred nurtured by members of this society with those of other. Arissa, thus becomes a victim of 'Ethnocentrism' (38). It is not written upon her forehead that she is a widow and an equal rather slightly more a victim of World Trade Centre Attacks but it does shine upon her forehead that she is a Muslim and a Pakistani experiencing a diasporic feeling, she is conscious of being '**suspended in mid-air**' because of being homesick and a victim torn between two labels of identity, discrimination, racism and prejudice. Muslims considered as a race gone mad and bad leave another sense of hollowness and religious depravity in her mind. Her removal of '**Veil**' is symbolic of a '**New Beginning**' as she becomes aware of the need to be accepted in society and for that she frames and devises her own life plan. Taking up a job at '**Chamak**' where her artistic skills are

illuminated and her pent up emotions get an expression, Arissa is able to balance herself financially, for her own self and for the future of Raian, her son. She adapts herself to the practices of New World as a plan to move forward with her life.

With the revelation of giving birth to a child with CHARGE Syndrome, in a nutshell, Arissa's journey of loss comprises of only forty one days. The child as a gift from Faizan and a symbol of his memory initially provided her a source of hope but the very thought of the orphanage and abnormality of the unborn child before coming to the world, leads her to a dungeon of pessimism. She loses all the bits of positive energy and with unlucky fate circling her from all sides; she knows that she has become a '**Reluctant Traveler**' (Abdullah Chp 9).

Arisa Illahi's shift from pessimism to optimism is gradual but continuous. Along with all other factors, her brief but didactic relationship with Zaki contributes in making her aware of the reality that since she has lost the spring of her life and it is autumn that now welcomes her. She starts looking directly into the eyes of reality but initially, is fearsome of stumbling down. Abdullah slowly builds up the tension of moving from Arissa's flawed sense of direction, her flawed beauty and her flawed life to her flawless perception of life. "Arisa's sense of direction is seriously flawed...that part of the brain that makes sense of directions never fully develops..." (Tichleaar, *Reader Views*).

The narrative in the initial parts of the novel is highly interrogative. It appears that the protagonist is unsure, insecure, confused, restless and questions and laments upon whatever befalls her as an expression of lost and perturbed mentality but it also marks a sense of

consciousness that she does not live in oblivion. The emotional obstacles faced by Arissa are, despair, angst, absurdity, alienation and nostalgia. Abdullah penetrates into the mental conflict of Arissa and juxtaposes the feeling of loss with a subtle tinge of hope. Arissa finds her solace and catharsis in 'Art' and it provides her with a healing effect, she says “In all fairness, colors define me” (Abdullah Chp 2). The biggest conflict that she faces is loneliness and the feeling of being incomplete physically and psychologically. Zaki comes to her life as a hope of eradicating this solitude but Arissa's calculated decision labels him as a misfit for a relationship, ultimately explaining that she fears loneliness no more. Tragedy occurs when there is a conflict but Abdullah propounds that one needs to crawl if not move at par with tragedy so much so that the tragic feeling falls back leaving you lighter. Therefore, multifarious levels of challenges increase Arissa's potential to fight them off, ruin them and tatter them to pieces. Agents that help her to be an optimistic are Faizan's memory, her son Raian, completing Faizan's book, and the strong and steadfast personalities of Ami and Baba. Her resolutions turn out to be the removal of 'Veil', 'Move' on with life and do justice to 'Soul Searcher' by showing it the light of the day.

Facing the reality of death directly, makes Arissa reject the beauty of life but this renouncement makes her strong and fearless about loss. Death transforms the feeling of irreparable loss to the appreciation of loss. From minute level of optimism where Arissa searches for the dead body of Faizan, Abdullah moves to the height and magnitude of Optimism where Arissa preserves Faizan's legacy and ambition in the form of completing his book and his identity and existence in the form of giving birth and raising up Raian as she says, “I had survived, I realized with a degree of pride. I had not succumbed to the pain of my loss” (Abdullah Chp 18). More than Faizan as a person in her life, it is Faizan and the power of her

love for him that becomes a vital cause of her survival. In short, giving life to the pages of Faizan's '**Soul Searcher**' gives life to Arissa's soul.

The recollections of her past, Faizan and her blissful marital life construct and define her future. Here, Abdullah shows a belief that real life is not devoid of imagination and inner unconscious processes. Arissa lives by the memory and re memory of Faizan. Her psychology merges past with present and future, killing the spatial time considerations. It is the interpretation of an experience in a positive way that influences the outcomes positively. Abdullah exposes the value of each human life as in preserving Faizan's life through recollecting his memory time and again, Arissa preserves her own life and identity. Also, it is her will power that helps her to improve with passage of time.

It is incredible to note how *Saffron Dreams* (2009) opens with dark and desolate images. The description becomes lighter in its pictorial representation as Arissa learns to reconcile with fate. The very nature of tragedy is expressed sensationally where chapter one opens when the season of autumn at its apex and the outer atmosphere is '**foggy**' as Arissa walks past the trees in full bareness and fallen leaves with tinges of yellow and pale shades. The season co relates with the mental state of Arissa and she feels herself as a toy horse that rejoices while swinging as an outward gesture but is bound to a fixed position. Arissa is fixed as to what will be her future course as an untimely widow. She experiences a feeling of being '**adrift**' and '**afloat**' and a bird that has a single wing. This single wing represent her status as a student of motherhood whose lesson to fly and soar to heights must be special and efficiently planned since she has no husband

to share the duty with her. She thus, gropes in dark and lands empty handed with a feeling of hollowness after an undesired happening.

Moving on to the positive descriptive images in the novel, one of the most prevalent and eye catching image is the one that the title creates. *Saffron Dreams* (2009) talks about a concrete and an abstract image of saffron and dreams and this is how Abdullah has juxtaposed the extremely realistic elements with highly imaginative elements in the novel. Saffron is a herb which is added to any dish in order to make the taste unique and adorable. The aspirations which both Arissa and Faizan nurtured before the tragedy befalls them are unique like the taste of saffron. Arissa hopes to materialize these saffron dreams and this is from where positivity originates within her. Faizan's love related to her through a pair of blue socks where later on one sock loses its shape by pulling a string of wool convey the image of separation as an inevitable reality. From black, Arissa learns to subjugate to the presence of white color symbolizing her colorless but satisfied life. The images are realistic just like the realistic mental state of the protagonist. Arissa's dream in which her home is set ablaze shows how the fire dancer crept past her life leaving behind only the fillers of that fire. These images declare the notion of completion and an end to adversaries in her life; it is her own sense of resolution that completes her.

Saffron Dreams (2009) is a 'chiaroscuro' piece of work in which Abdullah has very finely juxtaposed brighter with darker shades of life coming up with the true grey shades which are natural and realistic. Throughout the course of the novel, Abdullah establishes the negative idea very poignantly and intensely ending with gradual but comparatively brief resolution. The time span of Arissa as a struggler is larger and rapid in comparison to the final outcome of Arissa as a

survivor where she establishes a direction of her life. Her soul is no more in destitute, her existence no more lives in an oblivion and her life is no more tattered and broken.

Chapter 4

Saffron Dreams- An Existential View

From Centuries, literature of all genres has tried to define the meaning of life from different perspectives and manners. The only crude and rough boundary appearing between the primitive idea of the exploration of life's meaning and the neonate or post modernist one is that in the later life is deciphered on the basis of its reality and purpose where as in the former, man suffers the dilemma of restoring, preserving and securing the essence of the acquired meaning of human life. Existentialism explores the meaning of life by emphasizing upon its importance and value. It primarily focuses upon an individual and his experiences that shape him, making it within his reach to live his life in the most sincere and complete manner. Each life has its self created standards upon which morals and values are measured. From the chaotic explanations that the world provides of human life and the purpose of the existence of a human being, Existentialism involves an attempt to develop an understanding

After the Second World War, writings of prominent names like Jean Paul Sartre, Simon de Beauvoir, Albert Camus and Franz Fanon were considered as dealing with the significance of human existence, importance of devising ways to fathom out obstacles in life, formation of an authentic individuality, admitting the temporality and mortality of human life and the presence of alienation or forlornness in life. Absurdity is dealt in context of life and the process to attain existence as the one from absurdity to a well defined meaning. This craving of meaning instills

determination to get rid of the idea of being a stranger in world or world as a strange land that cannot be comprehended. Existentialists take this world as a picture and the hero is a common individual. For them, individual experiences are highly interesting and capable enough to be explored. The impact of Existentialism on literature is significant and substantial. The basic doctrines handled by existentialists are ‘man’s alienation, dread, absurdity, bad faith, responsibility, commitment to freedom and anguish’ (Ahmed 10).

Jean Paul Sartre (1905-1980), was a French philosopher, writer and a political activist. He is considered as the hierophant of modern Existentialism and he built a connection between literature and philosophy in his writings. According to Sartre, mankind is responsible for its own actions.. Dreams and intentions are not valid in such cases because they are not grounded in reality. Man, in all circumstances is condemned to be free because he did not create himself; yet he is free to do as he wishes. From a general view point, Existentialism is described as an optimism driven by concrete human acts. Mankind is essentially free and not bound by religion or dogmas and consequently needs to take responsibility and act according to conscience and ideology.

Exploring the feminine emotional world of women, Abdullah brings to light the various deeper forces at work in feminine sensibility and psychology. This predilection leads her to examine the psyche of her woman protagonist, Arissa when she is confronted with the absurdity of life as an untimely gap created by lost relations. Abdullah places Arissa in a hostile and uncongenial environment as a Pakistani widow in New World who has to fight against the odds. This problem of the tragic tension between the individual and her unfavorable environment acquires the dimension of existential angst.

Sartre says in 'Existentialism is Humanism', 'Man first of all exists, encounters himself, surges up in the world- and defines himself afterwards'. According to him, Existence is active and not passive. Man exists by fashioning his own existence and by choice of doing something and ignoring the other; he gives an essence to his existence (Cuddon 109). One of the most important notions of Sartre is that of 'Existence preceding Essence'. Existence coming before Essence has two possibilities. Firstly, the universe being utterly meaningless so that man creates his own values. This is very much like calling universe as the biggest absurdity and the real challenge is to decipher a sense out of the absurd and unclear information that is provided. Thus, *Saffron Dreams* (2009) as an absurdist piece of work, which operates within the framework of chaos but Abdullah negates a complete absurdist view of the universe. According to her, the basic laws of nature and passions are liable for the growth of a person like her protagonist and they contain a strong presence of a cause and effect relationship.

Secondly, by saying 'Existence precedes Essence', Sartre believes in the presence of a hidden meaning in existence which is only revealed if man exercises his resources and abilities at full. This idea is true to Abdullah's portrayal of Arissa. With losses hovering all over, Arissa utilizes all her powers to get stability. Before she becomes a widow, Abdullah does not penetrate into her psyche very deeply as her psychological state is not much significant at that time but the moment Faizan dies an unnatural death, Arissa loses the balance of her existence and her emotions are triggered. This is where Abdullah works upon the protagonist's mental state. She takes the reader much into the recesses of the protagonist, making it apparent how her essence or character is formulated. The development is not simplistic for, it has diverse stages and levels of complexity influencing Arissa both physically and mentally. She shuns away hopelessness and gloom by reconciling and accepting whatever she is left with and confirming to Sartre's

reinforcement that if hopelessness takes over, destruction is obvious. She becomes so strong that she is fearless of everything.

After Faizan's death, Arissa questions herself that what should she do with her life now? She has an unclear and foggy idea of her future course of life. This is a very much an Existentialist question as 'Internal Conflict' is significant in consideration with Existentialists. As Arissa's struggle is unceasing, indefinite and infinite, she makes a strenuous effort to contend and compete against difficulties showing that it is not life that never saw pain and misery, that never faced adversary directly or indirectly and that never sympathized with the sufferer. There resides a perpetual struggle behind every step that she is forced to take as she lives within the confines of social, psychological and physical mediums. She is bound at many levels starting from her own outlook of life to the larger organic unity of life. This gestalt creates considerable extent of limitations that become the defining elements of how she acts and reacts to the situations and defines her life.

Abdullah's treatment in *Saffron Dreams* (2009) is the 'end' of struggle as survival. If struggle is unstable, survival is stable. With struggle initiation of something new takes place. This activity is continuous as from the time Arissa is born; she is put in a situation that is likely to be unhappy and dissatisfied. Arissa faces the homelessness created by her real mother. She says 'Hate. Such a strong word, but it was also a mother's final parting gift to us, the knowledge that she despised us, me most of all' (Abdullah Chp 4). On the other hand, survival is complete and linked with achievement. The battle between suffering, desire to mar it and final end is not a physical action as a compulsion. It is more of a mental and psychological progress attained by making resolute decisions within the mind. Faizan's novel, 'Soul Searcher' is symbolic of search and quest of a soul, life, dynamics and flux. The moment Arissa completes it; she gains her

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identity, “Saffron. It reminded me of an unfinished project that was much closer to completion than it was a year ago” (Chp 2). Searching the meaning of her life, Arissa sustains by getting validity and authenticity of her existence through making her own choices. Loaded with responsibilities as a widow, she takes each step forward with a caution. The bombardment of problems remains continuous making her negate the reality of widowhood completely.

Arissa faces a strong existential angst when Raian is born. She feels her way to destination filled with utter forlornness but is conscious of the freedom that she has just got. “I imagined being a toy horse, galloping on bound legs, destination firmly defined, thrilled with providence in my naivete” (Abdullah Chp 1). The same feeling of angst also takes over her when she decides to part ways with Zaki. Making a choice of a secure past over an insecure future, Arissa embraces Faizan and Raian as the sharers of her grief and partners in her journey. Similar is her situation, when she meets her real mother who apologizes years later for the vacuum and deprivations that she caused in Arissa’s life but here again Arissa holds upon the dignity of her lonely struggles and rejects the late shower of maternal love from her mother not forgetting the suffering that she has gone through, all alone.

“Marching over the terrains of time” is an existential resolution and Sartre propounds the presence of this resolution in every human being. Those who determine their identity are the ones who are able to locate the abilities that they possess and Arissa becomes an example of such a person. Moreover, what Abdullah means to say is that life is never lived as a whole but in parts, but moment by moment. This makes the journey easier to go through and interpret. By an elaborate expression of her free will and demonstration of her ability to choose and act, Arissa sets the forest on fire towards the end of the novel. This fire, created by her is the result and manifestation of her existential angst to destroy the old and meaningless and make room for the

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new and significant. It is an affirmation of her search for values in an otherwise futile existence. If solitude is the crux of her life then she accepts it happily. If Raian becomes her strength, she appreciates and values it.

Saffron Dreams (2009) circulates around the importance of self. Reaching towards selfhood is a struggle to attain a distinct, different and fully developed consciousness of one's self. The ability to regain an essential trait of personality which is lost when circumstances trample over you determines the 'self'. Arissa's character is shaped by the decisions she makes and the feelings she has to cope with. In this way, she reaches near to self-awareness. Her character shapes and develops by adapting to what is essential for her and by discarding the unimportant. She formulates her preferences in life like Raian as her utmost recipient of attention and Zaki as a prospective lover, an insignificant distraction. Arissa experiences all this in stages leading to the development of her psychology. Existentialists see it as, "Man is born into a kind of void, a mud. He has the liberty to remain in this mud and thus lead a passive, supine acquiescent existence..." (Cuddon 109)

The images of ugliness, destruction, annihilation and loneliness are consistently used by Abdullah in order to show the existential tone of the novel. With the help of several images a strong atmosphere of solitary introspection is created. The loneliness embedded in outside atmosphere creates a strong sense of inner loneliness. The novel opens with the season of autumn at its apex and the colors of leaves are described as '**glowing golds**', '**bloodlike reds**', '**brazen brown**' and '**somber yellows**'. These colors convey a strong impact of energy and life but all at once Abdullah juxtaposes the vitality of these colors to the '**cracking**' of '**crispy**' leaves under Arissa's feet, "lifeless but not without a voice" (Abdullah Chp 1). She relates the presence of

hope in lifelessness. The havoc played by World Trade Centre attacks is described in phrases like “a new layer of sediment composed of ash and dust had formed a permanent footprint on the river bed after the towers had collapsed” (Chp 1) and “New York skyline blown away by raging swords of fire” (Chp 8). Faizan’s unnatural death leaves Arissa sheltered no more. Thus, nature speaks of her mood and sets an existential background for the novel.

Loss, separation and nostalgia are the feelings prominent within the psyche of Arissa more intensely. She is terrified for being in complete solitude all of a sudden. Fate governs her life. She laments by exclaiming “this was too big for us, too big for me. This cannot be a part of our lives” (Abdullah Chp 8). Her helplessness conveys a highly tragic tone where she says “I refused to sleep or lie down. I felt that if I did, I’d lose him forever” (Chp 8).

Arissa experiences a strong omnipresence of facticity in her life. She feels herself existing in a world not of her own making and completely indifferent to her concerns, desires and ambitions and that she is not the source of her existence, instead thrown into a world she does not and cannot control. She says “Waking was a nightmare, a realization of a life stretching before me without a partner” (Abdullah Chp 8). Moreover, Arissa shows anxiety in her behavior as well. She is faced with the responsibility of choosing her own nature and values, and, in doing so, she is faced with an awesome responsibility of choosing human nature and values for all humanity through free choices. The exertion of blunt reality is seen in the lines when Arissa resolves to start afresh. Her agitation and anxiety is produced because of losing her balance compelling her to say, “Until I have it all together in my hand, I remain agitated, anxious. The new twist in my life has caught me unaware, and I had not found my balance yet” (Chp 10).

Saffron Dreams (2009) is an optimistic and existential piece of work but it opens up many questions while also answers many. An existential view holds that the world runs opposite

to man's dreams and makes it impossible to realize his dreams. The absurdity of world is revealed through chances in life, death, the esoteric reality and uncontrollable reality. Alienation in pursuit of individuality, freedom and dreams is also a thread that runs throughout the course of the novel. A search for truth, sincerity and pure existence in a world ridden with illusions and absurdity is explored with depth. Arissa feels alienated and rejected amidst a world and society she cannot connect with. She struggles for this need of her relationship with others. Existentialism explores that in order to navigate successfully through absurdity, one must take action while be aware of the falsity that surrounds man if he hopes to achieve a lasting sense of purpose and meaning.

CONCLUSION

Saffron Dreams (2009) exposes the common tragic perception in a highly uncommon way. Abdullah explores a continuing urge to trace a sense and meaning out of the haphazard framework of external circumstances. Using psychological progressive development of the protagonist, she states how struggle blesses Arissa with yet another life which is far better than the one she would have lived, had the towers not collapsed. Abdullah believes in the importance of an optimistic interpretation of the hardships in life. Optimism is a key to the acceptance of reality making tragedy lose its hopelessness and connotations of psychological devastation. Focusing upon highlighting the path through which Arrisa Illahi moves from suffering and pessimistic view of life towards acceptance and optimism and finally concludes with a definition of obstacles as necessary ingredients of the composition of human life is how Abdullah treats her subject matter. In an interesting manner she traces out the conception of the value of individuality that lies in facing tough situations and utilizing all mental and physical powers to become a survivor from being a sufferer.

The novel attracts as an Existential piece of work through and through. It unfolds a different kind of journey where Arissa does explore her identity and the purpose and meaning of life but this is done through an evolutionary process. The intricacies of this process can be very suitably viewed from the stance of Existentialists, especially Jean Paul Sartre. The novel contains within itself, most of the prominent Existential themes like sufferings of Arissa that leave her in solitude and loneliness. This feeling of loss is heightened by the deprivation she faces. She is

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challenged in taking some of the significant decisions of her life, ultimately facing angst and strong sense of responsibility. And, as the novel closes, she no longer remains in the quest of her identity. She reaches to a staunch definition of her life. She is sure and confident about her future and it is her very own self that brings her out of the state of destitute.

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